

## President II

I was really interested in the readings on going public this week, as it seemed to speak to a lot of what has been happening with Obama and the health care debate. At the outset, I should say that I have been paying less attention to the debate than I probably ought to have, so I would love to hear what others who know more about the situation have to say. With that out of the way, one of the first things that struck me was Cameron's finding that Senators behave differently as presidents.<sup>1</sup> With first-hand understanding of how bargaining politics work and knowledge of how going public can break down negotiations, Senators are less likely to use (or over-use) the public option. This certainly comports with Obama's behavior in the health care debate. My impression was that, other than vague statements of support for universal health care, Obama was fairly quiet about where he stood on various aspects of the debate. With clear majorities in both Houses, he may have been behaving strategically, as Canes-Wrone found—not going public when Congress is likely to take the desired action. In fact, it wasn't until Scott Brown's election made congressional action less likely that Obama took to the airwaves. Cameron says that presidents will go public when bargaining options fail; this may have been the turning point for the president. That said, Canes-Wrone indicated that presidents will only go public if an issue is popular. Pollster data show that only about 43 percent of people support health care reform (but this figure has been fairly constant since the end of last year, so it hasn't become *less* popular). I'd love to hear other (likely more-informed) opinions about how this particular case study does or does not comport with the two pieces we read!

Leaving aside the health care debate, I was wondering if the idea of going public had a similar game-theoretic advantage as Moe and Howell predicted for unilateral executive action. This is certainly a first-mover situation, as opposed to a unilateral action situation, so the mechanics might be different. As I recall from last semester's game theory, there are some models that advantage the first mover and some that do the opposite. It seems as though public announcements of a position might only provide an advantage in situations when the public is supportive and motivated, though I'd need to think a little longer about how to model this situation.

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<sup>1</sup> I was entertained by Cameron's expectation that Senators will be unlikely candidates under the current primary system, given the last election pitted two Senators against each other. That said, the more I thought about it, his prediction may still hold. Obama perhaps had the greatest "outsider" claim of the Senatorial candidates for the Democrats—certainly, Hillary Clinton couldn't claim that!—and Bill Richardson was the only Governor running. On the Republican side, McCain often presented himself as an outsider fighting from Washington. His nomination of Palin could also be interpreted as a strategy to enhance this outsider persona.

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